

Bullying Prevention Policy



Rationale

The dignity of the human person is the foundation of all Catholic social teaching and inherent to our education ministry. The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) and Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) recognises the right of 'all students' to feel safe and be free from bullying. Students should also be protected from perceptions from peers, staff and parents that could lead them to being labelled as **bullies** or **victims**.

At St. Thomas' School we do not tolerate bullying, harassment or violence in any form and we believe bullying can have a serious long term impact on a victim's sense of self-worth, personal growth and self esteem. Every person has the right to feel safe from verbal, physical and emotional abuse. Bullying is therefore not tolerated at our school.

Definitions

The Australian Government website www.bullyingnoway.gov.au/teachers/index.html states that, "Bullying is an ongoing misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that causes physical and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power over one or more persons. Bullying can happen in person or online, and it can be obvious (overt) or hidden (covert).

Bullying of any form or for any reason can have long-term effects on those involved, including bystanders.

Single incidents and conflict or fights between equals, whether in person or online, are not defined as bullying. However, these conflicts still need to be addressed and resolved".

Bullying may occur in relation to but is not restricted to:

- culture
- gender
- race
- ability or disability
- physical appearance
- beliefs
- age
- religion
- economic status
- sexual harassment
- homophobia

Types of bullying include direct physical aggression, direct verbal attacks, indirect bullying (such as spreading gossip and cyber bullying).

Direct Physical and Verbal Aggression: includes punching, kicking, pushing and interfering with or damaging property, offensive gestures, name calling, writing derogatory notes or material.

Indirect Bullying includes

- spreading rumours
- deliberately excluding someone from activities or events
- victimising someone because that person has made a complaint, is proposing to make a complaint, has helped someone else make a complaint and/or is acting as a witness to a complaint
- mimicking

Cyberbullying includes behaviour that constitutes direct and indirect bullying using digital technologies.

Bullying is not

- single episodes of social rejection or dislike
- single episode acts of nastiness or spite
- random acts of aggression or intimidation
- mutual arguments, disagreements or fights.

However, these actions can cause great distress and should be addressed. However, they're not examples of bullying unless there is a deliberate and persistent intention to victimise, humiliate, intimidate or threaten. Any act of aggression conveyed using digital technologies is considered an act of bullying due to the potential for such aggression to be viewed by a wider audience and receive exposure for a greater length of time.

(See Appendix 1: Further definitions of Bullying).

Guiding Principles

At St Thomas' we believe that

- everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity.
- every person's emotional well being needs to be nurtured.
- each member of our school community requires a strong sense of well-being, respect, belonging, security and communication opportunities to enhance their health and wellbeing.
- all members of the community need to have the opportunity to acknowledge and then restore any harm that occurs through the Restorative Practices approach.
- all staff, parents and students have the right to be listened to and be valued and will reciprocate these values to others.
- all staff, parents and students will have a common understanding of the values that create a safe and secure environment.
- all students take responsibility for achieving their personal best and gaining a sense of self worth and identity in the school and wider community.
- all students take responsibility for their own behaviour and understand that their behaviour, both positive and negative, has an impact on themselves and the community around them.
- all staff, parents and students operate restoratively whenever possible.
- students have a right and are encouraged to report bullying when it happens to themselves or someone else.

- students learn more effectively if they feel safe and have clearly stated and consistent expectations.
- expectations of all community members need to be clear and explicit and that all need to be made aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Responsibilities

All members of the community are responsible for ensuring that acceptable standards of conduct are maintained at all times.

Responsibility of Staff

- to model appropriate behaviours at all times
- to address all reported and observed incidents immediately in accordance with the steps set out in this policy
- to engage in a duty of care for our students
- to report incidents of bullying to parents, Principal, Deputy Principal and Student Wellbeing Leader

Reporting such incidences includes the following process and procedures:

- The School's Leadership are required to formally adopt and implement an anti-bullying policy.
- The school's Bullying Prevention Policy must be made available to school personnel, published on the school website (or where none exists, be otherwise readily accessible to parents and pupils on request).
- The parents of the parties involved should be contacted at an early stage to inform them of the matter and explain the actions being taken (by reference to the school policy); and
- The relevant teacher must keep appropriate written records which will assist his/her efforts
- The school will endeavour to resolve the issues and restore, as far as is practicable, the relationships of the parties involved.

The relevant teacher must record the bullying behaviour (and a copy must be provided to the Principal or Deputy Principal as applicable) in the following circumstances:

- where the school has decided as part of its Bullying Prevention Policy that in certain circumstances bullying behaviour must be recorded and reported immediately to the Principal or Deputy Principal as applicable; and
- in cases where he/she considers that the bullying behaviour has not been adequately and appropriately resolved after he/she has determined that bullying behaviour occurred.

The procedures include arrangements which require that, at least once in every school term, the Principal will provide a report to the Leadership team setting out:

1. The overall number of bullying cases reported to the Principal or Deputy Principal since the previous report.

2. Confirmation that all of these cases have been, or are being, dealt with in accordance with the school's Bullying Prevention Policy and these procedures.
3. The Leadership team must undertake an annual review and revision of the school's Bullying Prevention Policy and its implementation by the school. Written notification that the review has been completed must be made available to school personnel, published on the school website.

Responsibilities of Students

- to report observed incidents to an adult
- to not be a bystander and assist a peer if they are being bullied by reporting it to a teacher
- to not bully others

Responsibilities of Parents

- to be aware of the signs of bullying eg.
 - unwillingness to attend school
 - damaged clothes
 - pattern of feeling unwell
 - missing equipment
- to inform the classroom teacher/Principal as soon as possible if they become aware of bullying behaviour
- to support their child to inform a teacher if he/she is being bullied or has observed it
- wherever possible, collect evidence of aggressive behaviour in the form of screenshots, photos, conversation transcripts, etc.

Parents are not to approach another student or parent in relation to a bullying incident. Parents and carers should address their concerns to their child's classroom teacher, a member of the school leadership team or the Principal.

Process

If a bullying situation is reported to the school, the following steps will be followed.

1. The complaint will be investigated by the classroom teacher and a member of the school leadership team.
2. Interviews with all relevant parties will be conducted and any evidence considered to determine if the reported behaviours are aligned with the definition and characteristics of bullying.
3. If the complaint is shown to have substance then any or all of the following actions will follow
 - a. The complaint will be managed with a sense of urgency which may include restrictions on play areas and interactions with others.
 - b. An investigation including the classroom teacher, member of the leadership team, the Bully and the victim.
 - c. Restorative conversations for the victim and the bully in the presence of the classroom teacher and member of the leadership team if appropriate
 - d. Appropriate peer support for the student will be organised.
 - e. Notifications to all parents and carers will occur.
 - f. If appropriate, a Behaviour Plan will be formulated for the bully.
 - g. Counselling/support for the victim and the bully may be offered.

Preventative Measures

St Thomas' will

- promote positive behaviour through values education programmes.
- provide staff with ongoing professional learning related to bullying
- Explicitly teach material on bullying, resilience, social skills and social emotional learning in the general curriculum.
- provide material and resources on bullying, resilience, social skills and social emotional learning regularly in level and school newsletters, school website and apps.
- participate in days of action against bullying.

St Thomas' will ensure that Ken Rigby's (2010) six major intervention methods are reflective in coming to a mutual resolution. These include:

- **Traditional Disciplinary Approach** which includes preliminary discussions with the class, talks with parents and students.
- **Strengthening the victim and bully** with strategies to assist them to learn to respond to matters using a positive approach.
- **Mediation** involves all parties seeking help from a mediator/teacher to resolve the issue that is causing conflict.
- **Restorative Practices** are designed to restore damaged relationships between individuals or groups.
- **The Support Group Method** which involves interviewing the victim, then the group of students or individuals involved, then ending with a combined meeting with all parties.
- **The method of Shared Concern** is based on reports and/or observations and then meeting with suspected Bullies individually.

Additional Resources

National Centre Against Bullying - Alannah and Madeline Foundation

National Safe Schools Framework

Safe Schools Hub

Bullying No Way www.bullyingnoway.gov.au

Bully Stoppers

Lifeline

Kids Helpline

Parenting Ideas - Michael Grose

Ken Rigby (2002) New Perspectives on Bullying.

Sheryl Hemphill (2014) "School Bullies Twice As Likely to Engage in Violent Behaviour"- Catholic Communications, Sydney Archdiocese.

Australian Communication Media Association (ACMA)

Ratification

This policy will be reviewed annually in consultation with the school community.

It will then be made available on the school website or via the school office.

APPENDIX:

OTHER DEFINITIONS OF BULLYING

Rigby, (2002) defines Bullying as involving a desire to hurt +hurtful action + a power imbalance + (typically) repetition + and unjust use of power + evident enjoyment by the aggressor and a sense of being oppressed on the part of the victim.”

Hemphill, (2014) defines “School-based ‘traditional’ bullying as aggressive or hostile intentional acts perpetrated repeatedly by one or more individuals towards a victim with an intent to harm. Bullying is further differentiated from other forms of aggression on the basis of power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim such as the difference in physical size or strength or status within the school community. Bullying can be covert, such as spreading rumours and exclusion, or it can be overt such as verbal and physical abuse.”

Restorative Practices

Restorative practice is a strategy that seeks to repair relationships that have been damaged, including those damaged through bullying. It does this by bringing about a sense of remorse and restorative action on the part of the offender and forgiveness by the victim.

The rationale behind this approach is that when offenders reflect upon their harm to victims:

- They become remorseful and act restoratively.
- Practitioners can focus on the unacceptable behaviour of offenders rather than their moral character
- This can lead to healthier interpersonal relations among members of the school community and more effective learning.